

Call for Papers

Posthuman? New Perspectives on Nature/Culture

4th Symposium of Social and Cultural Studies at SoCuM (Research Center of Social and Cultural Studies Mainz), September 19-20, 2019, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

In the past decades, one could witness a growing number of approaches and positions emerging from the humanities and cultural or social studies questioning the focus on the human as an acting individual and primarily cultural being. Despite their different vantage points, these approaches are united by the instance that they all challenge and irritate established dualistic views on nature/culture, and propose alternative frames of reference, which we could also refer to as post-human perspectives. Depending on the different directions, theirs is a matter of an inclusive understanding of nature and culture, of questions on the decentering of humans, or even on their transformation and overcoming - right up to collectives and hybrids made up of human and nonhuman entities. We can distinguish between different analytical tendencies (such as subject vs. object oriented; normative vs. descriptive; dystopian vs. utopian, etc.), whereby it is not uncommon to argue from a political perspective and an enhanced ecological sensibility. Humankind are to relinquish their hegemonic position by ceasing to conceive themselves as cultural beings superior to 'nature', but rather establish relations towards other entities, connect with them, embed themselves within them, or even accept a subordinate role to them.

Thus, the question of what is *Posthuman* takes center stage – be it that humans are merely regarded as one entity among many (in the sense of besides, below, or with others), or that the age of humankind appears as fading (as within the discourse on the Anthropocene). This way, we can make out a *posthuman turn* - when looking at new concepts of biosociality, transformations into biotechnological societies, scenarios of a new climate regime, or the enforced inclusion of powerful materiality.

The conference will give scholars of various fields a broad forum for discussion by welcoming their respective approaches to redefining nature/culture. This interdisciplinary debate takes up the problems raised by posthumanist approaches, especially with regard to the nature/culture-divide. Scholars from various disciplines are invited to present their research and discuss their ideas and perspectives. The following questions will be central: How do posthuman perspectives transform ideas of nature/culture in social sciences and cultural studies? Which alternative concepts beyond nature and culture become apparent? Which positions do the perspectives ascribe to humans? Which imagery, which ascriptions and interpretations, figurations and concepts do posthuman or posthumanist argumentations resort to? Which potentials and boundaries are indicated in terms of theoretical, empirical, and analytical matters? Could this interdisciplinary trend be construed as an answer to certain societal, environmental, and technological developments? Which historical and philosophical motifs can be identified within posthumanist and/or postanthropocentric argumentations? What role do ecological demands and questions of responsibility play? How should the political and normative impetus of different approaches be handled? Which forms of cooperation between scientific and artistic approaches open up?

The conference will take place September 19-20, 2019 at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. It is carried out by the Research Center of Social and Cultural Studies Mainz (SoCuM). Keynote speakers are Prof. Rosi Braidotti (Utrecht University), Prof. Matthias Groß (Department of Urban and Environmental Sociology, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ) and, as part of the Georg Forster Lecture 2019, Prof. Timothy Ingold (University of Aberdeen).

We ask you to submit your proposal by e-mail in form of an abstract (400 words) by **February 28, 2019**. Please send your contribution as a PDF to posthuman@uni-mainz.de. Contributions may be written in German or English.

Organizers: Dr. Torsten Cress, Dr. Tobias Huff, Kornelia Engert, M.A., Dr. Oliwia Murawska, Jun.-Prof. Annika Schlitte, Dr. Christiane Schürkmann